

**RANGE EXPANSION OF WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT IN
SEVERAL FISHLESS STREAMS OF SOUTHWEST MONTANA
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
DECISION NOTICE**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region Three, Bozeman
June 17, 2013**

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to introduce westslope cutthroat trout into 20 fishless streams across the Big Hole, Madison, Gallatin, and Jefferson river drainages. These fishless streams are generally small (less than 3 miles) and isolated from areas downstream by natural fish barriers (e.g., waterfalls or stream goes dry). Upstream of the natural barriers, the habitat has been surveyed and found adequate to potentially support a fishery. Westslope cutthroat trout would be introduced to these streams in an effort to conserve local populations that may be at risk due to competition and hybridization with non-native trout or other factors such as small population size, limited habitat, and random events such as fire and floods. Fish would be captured from wild donor sources, transported to recipient streams, and released. Fertilized eggs may be collected in some cases from donor streams and incubated in recipient streams. There are 268 miles of inventoried fishless streams across the four drainages proposed for cutthroat introduction, and FWP is proposing to introduce fish into approximately 40 miles of these streams (15%).

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. An Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with MEPA was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on April 8, 2013.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for 30 days (through May 8, 2013). The EA was mailed to 44 individuals and groups. A legal notice was printed in the Montana Standard (Butte), Bozeman Chronicle, and the Madisonian newspapers. A draft EA was posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>. A total of one comment on this project was received.

Summary of Public Comment

Comment: “The Madison River Foundation is pleased to support the department’s proposed introduction of native westslope cutthroat trout to currently fishless streams on the Big Hole, Gallatin, Jefferson and Madison River drainages. Westslope cutthroat trout recovery and restoration is a priority of the Foundation. The addition of the Madison tributaries Nickerson Creek and South Fork of Cabin Creek to the inventory of streams with WCT populations is a

worthy undertaking. Expanding the range and distribution of WCT will add another measure of protection for this native species.”

Response: FWP concurs with the comments from the Madison River Foundation.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment, public comment, and benefits and risks associated with this project, it is my decision to go forward with the proposed action of introducing WCT to the fishless reaches of the proposed streams. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. J. Flowers', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor
